

Capsule Summary
SM-624
Palmer Boatbuilding Shop
Abell Vicinity
Private

c. 1930s

(page 1)

Lowly situated beside a marsh on St. Patrick's Creek near Abell, Maryland is Palmer's Boatbuilding Shop. Ever since it was built in the 1930s, this inconspicuous frame building has served as the boatbuilding and repair shop of Wilmer Palmer and his son Creighton. Born in 1900, Wilmer Palmer was the son of Edwin Palmer, a local tobacco farmer. Rather than join his dad in agricultural pursuits, Wilmer began building boats in the 1920s. Starting out with simple row skiffs, Wilmer soon worked his way up to larger and larger boats. To create an adequate indoor, heated work space he erected the boatbuilding shop. The shop was characterized by its wide open, rectangular plan, dirt floor, but relatively dark interior space. Boats were carried into and out of the building via a marine railway that ran from the interior of the building into St. Patrick's Creek.

Known for his fore-to-aft wood plank, vee-bottom, Potomac River dory boats, Palmer soon became a popular local boat builder. In an interview conducted in 1983, he recalled never being out of work between 1940 and 1958.¹ At one point he was building boats on mere speculation and had up to six boats on order. Despite never advertising, Palmer claimed he had clients from as far away as Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

Much of these traditions of construction were inherited by Wilmer's son Creighton, the current owner of the property and operator of the Palmer boatbuilding and repair enterprise. While

¹ Interview with Wilmer Palmer by Paula Johnson, April 7, 1983, Calvert Marine Museum, PRP PJR90, PJR91, and PJR92. All uncited information about boatbuilding was gleaned from this interview. An informal interview was conducted with Creighton Palmer in February, 1998 by Kirk E. Ranzetta.

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(page 2)

Creighton has built approximately two to three hundred dory boats, he rarely constructs them now due to rising costs, a shrinking market for handmade wood boats, and a growing reliance on fiberglass-bottomed boats. Creighton still uses the building as a repair and woodworking shop, but the marine railway attached to the shop is no longer functional and much of the interior space is devoted to wood storage. Overall, the boatbuilding shop is significant for its association with wood boat construction, local maritime industries, as well as a prominent boat building family.

SM-624, Palmer's Boatbuilding Shop
St. Mary's County
Maryland Comprehensive State Historic Preservation Data

Historic Context

Geographic Organization:	Western Shore
Chronological/Developmental Period:	Modern Period, 1930-present
Historic Period Theme:	Economic Cultural

Resource Type

Category:	Building
Historic Environment:	Rural
Historic Function and Use:	Boatbuilding Shop
Known Design Source:	None

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Part of Collingwood, Farrum, Cobrum, & Bedlam Neck

and/or common Palmer's Boatbuilding Shop (pref.)

2. Location

0.2 of a mile west of int. of Wilmer Palmer Rd. & Golden Thompson Rd., on Wilmer Palmer Road
street & number _____ not for publication

city, town Abell x vicinity of **congressional district** 7

state Maryland **county** St. Mary's TM-46, G-18, P-78

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Creighton W. Palmer

street & number PO Box 45 telephone no.: 301-769-2160

<u>city, town</u>	Abell	<u>state and zip code</u>	Maryland	20606
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5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. St. Mary's County Courthouse liber CBG 105

street & number _____ folio 60

city, town Leonardtown **state** Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title

date _____ federal _____ state _____ county _____ local _____

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Survey No. SM-624

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date of move _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Contributing Resource Count: 1

Palmer's Boatbuilding Shop is located approximately 0.2 mile west from the intersection of Golden Thompson and Wilmer Palmer Roads near Abell, Maryland. Approached via Wilmer Palmer Road, the building is situated on the south side of the road. Oriented on an east/west axis, the building's surrounding environment is characterized by low lying marsh with direct access to St. Patrick's Creek. A slight rise extends to the north and south of the building. Several other maritime related historic resources are in the immediate proximity. These include the Edwin Palmer House (SM-622), Palmer's Marine Railway (SM-623), as well as the Wilmer Palmer House (SM-621). The building is still being used, but the railway leading into the building is no longer functional.

Constructed in the 1920s, Palmer's Boatbuilding Shop is a long, one story, gable front, frame building with an axial plan and a gable roof. A series of cedar studs consist of the building's foundation. The exterior sheathing is intermittently composed of vertical, circular sawn plank siding fastened with wire nails as well as raised seam metal. The cornice has been left open exposing the rafter ends and the roof is covered with raised-seam metal.

The primary or west elevation faces St. Patrick's Creek. Two large swinging doors allow smaller boats, but usually boat hulls to be freely moved into and out of the building. Two rails running perpendicular to the building extend from St. Patrick's Creek and run under the large doors. Like Palmer's Marine Railway, these rails allowed boats to be pulled out of, as well as into, the water.

The north elevation features a series of three, six-pane fixed sash windows, a plexiglass window, and a plank door. A stove pipe is situated at approximately the building's mid-point.

The east elevation consists of the building's gable end and a small shed addition. The main block is pierced by a single, centrally located doorway constructed of vertical planks with horizontal battens. The shed addition is largely open on this elevation. It is used for storage as a series of stacked planks fill the interior space.

The south elevation of the main block is pierced by two one-over-one, double-hung sash windows, a fixed-sash six-pane window, and a plexiglass window. A small hole located near the beginning of the roof's cornice and midway across the elevation indicates the one time presence of a stove flue. The shed addition features several plexiglass as well as fixed-sash windows.

The interior is characterized by a wide open space with a dirt floor, marking it as a work area. The two rails extend through the middle of the building until it approaches its east end. Most of the electric and manual saws and tools are located on the north and east sides of the building with much of the interior devoted largely to wood storage. The interior walls have been left unfinished and the circular sawn frame has been left exposed. Much of the framing consists of two-by-four construction with the rafters merely butted to a wall plate. Each of the rafter pairs are joined through lapped collars but extensive wracking has precipitated the use of metal tie cables to keep the side walls from bowing. A series of three plexiglass skylights, located at the peak, add sorely needed light to an already dark interior. While no longer used for the actual construction of boat hulls, the shop is still used for woodworking and storage.

8. Significance

Survey No. SM-624

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	___ architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	humanitarian
___ 1800–1899	<u>X</u> commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
<u>X</u> 1900–	___ communications	<u>X</u> industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation
		___ invention		___ other (specify)

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

check: Applicable Criteria: X A ___ B X C ___ D
and/or

Applicable Exception: ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G

Level of Significance: ___ national ___ state X local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

Lowly situated beside a marsh on St. Patricks Creek near Abell, Maryland is Palmer's Boatbuilding Shop. Ever since it was built in the 1930s, this inconspicuous, frame building has served as the boatbuilding and repair shop of Wilmer Palmer and his son Creighton. Born in 1900, Wilmer Palmer was the son of Edwin Palmer, a local tobacco farmer. Rather than join his dad in agricultural pursuits, Wilmer began building boats in the 1920s. Starting out with simple row skiffs, Wilmer soon worked his way up to larger and larger boats. To create an adequate indoor, heated work space he erected the boatbuilding shop. The shop was characterized by its wide open, rectangular plan, dirt floor, but relatively dark interior space. Boats were carried into and out of the building via a marine railway that ran from the interior of the building into St. Patrick's Creek.

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Working off of pictures supplied to him by perspective buyers or by looking at other local examples, Palmer built everything from row skiffs to fifty foot long workboats. Construction of the hulls occurred solely in the boatbuilding shop, while the cabins were erected on the outside in the water. Beginning in November, Palmer would start the construction process by ordering white cedar planks as well as oak and mahogany. If they could not be obtained locally at places such as Hewitt or Dean Lumber, he often placed orders at lumber yards as far away as Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Once the materials were obtained, Palmer would set the keel and establish the curved timber frame for the exterior planks by using a template. With the skeleton established, Palmer would then place the white cedar planks into a steam box for about forty-five minutes in

¹ Interview with Wilmer Palmer by Paula Johnson, April 7, 1983, Calvert Marine Museum, PRP PJR90, PJR91, and PJR92. All uncited information about boatbuilding was gleaned from this interview. An informal interview was conducted with Creighton Palmer in February, 1998 by Kirk E. Ranzetta.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. SM-624

Interview with Creighton W. Palmer, February, 1998.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1 acreQuadrangle name Stratford HallQuadrangle scale 1:24 000UTM References do NOT complete UTM referencesA

Zone	Easting							Northing	

B

Zone	Easting							Northing	

C

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D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Same as per deed description.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirk E. Ranzetta, Historic Sites Surveyororganization St. Mary's County Dept. of Planning & Zoningdate 4-27-98street & number 22740 Washington Streettelephone 301-475-4662city or town Leonardtownstate Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
DHCP/DHCD
100 COMMUNITY PLACE
CROWNSVILLE, MD 21032-2023
514-7600

SM-624, Palmer Boatbuilding Shop
St. Mary's County
Significance 8.1

order to make them pliable and then fit them around the boats distinctively curved hull. Variations in the hull were governed by the woods ability to curve as well as the intended use of the boat for either river or bay work. For river boats, the dead rise was not as deep, but for bay boats, the bow was deeper to accommodate the rougher waters. By the spring, the hulls were placed in the water and cabins were built on top of them.

Much of these traditions of construction were inherited by Wilmer's son Creighton, the current owner of the property and operator of the Palmer boatbuilding and repair enterprise. While Creighton has built approximately two to three hundred dory boats, he rarely constructs them now due to rising costs, a shrinking market for handmade wood boats, and a growing reliance on fiberglass-bottomed boats. Creighton still uses the building as a repair and woodworking shop, but the marine railway is no longer functional and much of the interior space is used for wood storage.

Overall, the boatbuilding shop is significant for its association with wood boat construction, local maritime industries, as well as a prominent boat building family.

SM-624, Palmer Boatbuilding Shop
St. Mary's County
8.2 Significance

Chain-of-Title

(All deeds are located at the Land Records Office, St. Mary's County Courthouse, Leonardtown, Maryland unless otherwise noted.)

Reference: Liber CBG 105, Folio 60

Grantee: Creighton W. Palmer

Grantor: Wilmer E. Palmer, et al

Date: December 31, 1962

Notes: This one acre parcel on St. Patrick's Creek was once part of tracts called Collingwood, Farrum, Cobrum, and Bedlam Neck.

Reference: Liber CBG 87, Folio 414

Grantee: Margaret Palmer Kelly, et al

Grantor: Wilmer E. Palmer, et ux, et al

Date: April 25, 1960

Reference: Liber JMM 2, Folio 493

Grantee: Edwin J. Palmer

Grantor: Ellen D. Palmer, et al

Date: September 20, 1924

Reference: Liber JJG 3, Folio 354

Grantee: Edwin J. Palmer

Grantor: Samuel E. F. Palmer, executor of John Palmer

Date: February 17, 1896

Notes: Here the parcel includes 175 acres.

Reference: Liber JFF 9, Folio 464

Grantee: John Palmer

Grantor: George R. Gaither, Jr.

Date: March 27, 1887

Notes: The property here is listed as containing 440 acres.

Reference: Mortgage Record, Liber JFF 5, Folio 196

Grantee: Thomas H. Gaither

Grantor: Sarah A. Long

Date: September 12, 1881

Reference: Will Record, Liber JTMR 1, Folio 358

Grantee: Sarah A. Long

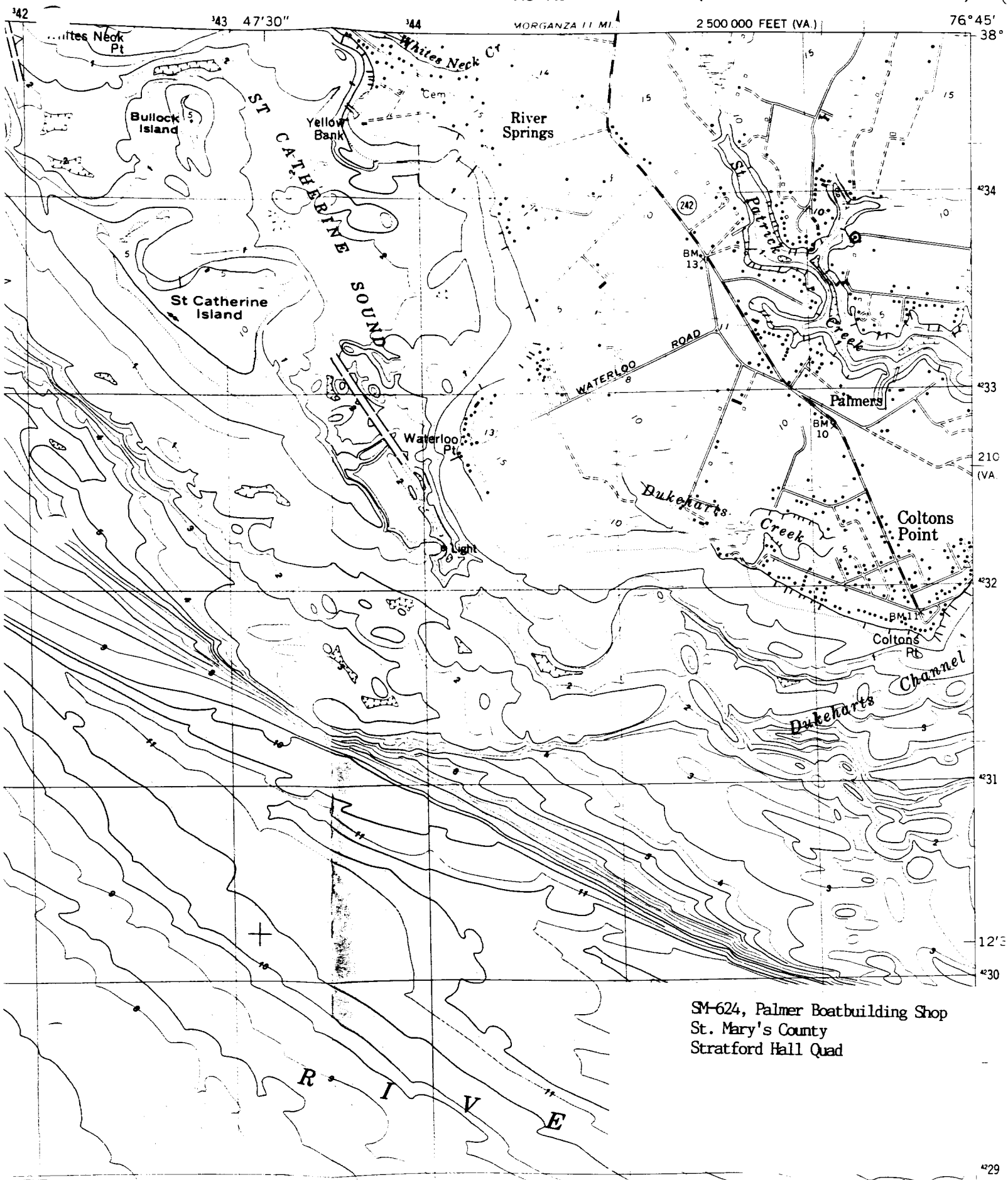
Grantor: John B. Long

Date: May 13, 1874

Notes: No previous deed is listed.

RGINIA
URCES

STRATFORD HALL QUADRANGLE
VIRGINIA-MARYLAND
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC-BATHYMETRIC)





CM-624

Palmer Boardbuilding Shop

St. Mary's County

Kirk Paucette

April/98

Ad. 540

N+W elevations

1 of 2



SM-624

Salmon Boatbuilding Shop

St. Mary's County

Kirk Panzetta

April/98

nd SHPO

Site elevations

2 of 2